A lesson on climate action

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Body

Last Friday, an estimated four million students and their supporters joined school strikes around the world to protest a lack of government action on climate change in advance of this week's UN Secretary General's climate action summit.

Who can blame them?

The United Nations warned last year that global warming must be kept to a maximum of 1.5 C to prevent a catastrophe of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people, not to mention the extinction of species like coral and pollinating insects.

But instead of seeing action to prevent such a disaster, students, led by Sweden's Greta Thunberg, see countries like the United States and Brazil doing away with measures designed to protect the environment.

No wonder then that tens of thousands of students are expected to skip classes and march in cities across Canada today in another day of global action to mark the end of the summit.

In this they are rightly being supported by a cross-Canada consortium of school boards, universities and colleges who see it not only as their student's right to miss classes to protest the lack of action on climate change, but as a teaching tool.

As the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board said: "We want our students to become global citizens who model ethical leadership and are ready to find innovative solutions to tackle the problems of tomorrow."

Similarly, the Toronto District School Board announced it won't penalize students for skipping classes to attend the rallies and provided teachers with extra curriculum resources to discuss the issue.

And Quebec's largest school board, the Commission scolaire de Montréal, is closing down for the day to let students attend the rally in that city, expected to draw hundreds of thousands of people, where Greta is scheduled to speak.

The 16-year-old has inspired millions of students around the world to hold Friday climate strikes since she began skipping classes last year to protest outside the Swedish parliament with a hand-painted sign that read "school strike for climate change."

Since then her anger, fear and frustration with the lack of government action on the issue has, understandably, only grown.

On Monday, the Nobel Prize nominee warned attendees at the UN climate summit: "The eyes of all future generations are upon you. If you choose to fail us, we will never forgive you."

Nor should young people. Amnesty International has warned that the failure of governments to tackle the climate crisis amounts to "one of the greatest intergenerational human rights violations in history."

Indeed, on Wednesday another UN report warned that the warming climate is already killing coral reefs, supercharging monster storms and fuelling deadly marine heat waves and record losses of sea ice.

Still, even as Canada's political parties roll out climate change initiatives to attract voters, an Ipsos poll released by Global News on Thursday contains disturbing evidence that the message isn't getting through. It shows that roughly half of Canadians - and a majority of Conservative voters - aren't willing to spend even a single extra penny to tackle climate change.

Is it any wonder then, that Greta and students around the world are asking this simple question: "Why should we be studying for a future that soon may be no more?"

As they strike across the country and around the world today, the students should be supported not just by the educators who are giving them a pass to skip class, but by their parents, guardians and everyone whose future is in grave peril.

That would be all of us.

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